

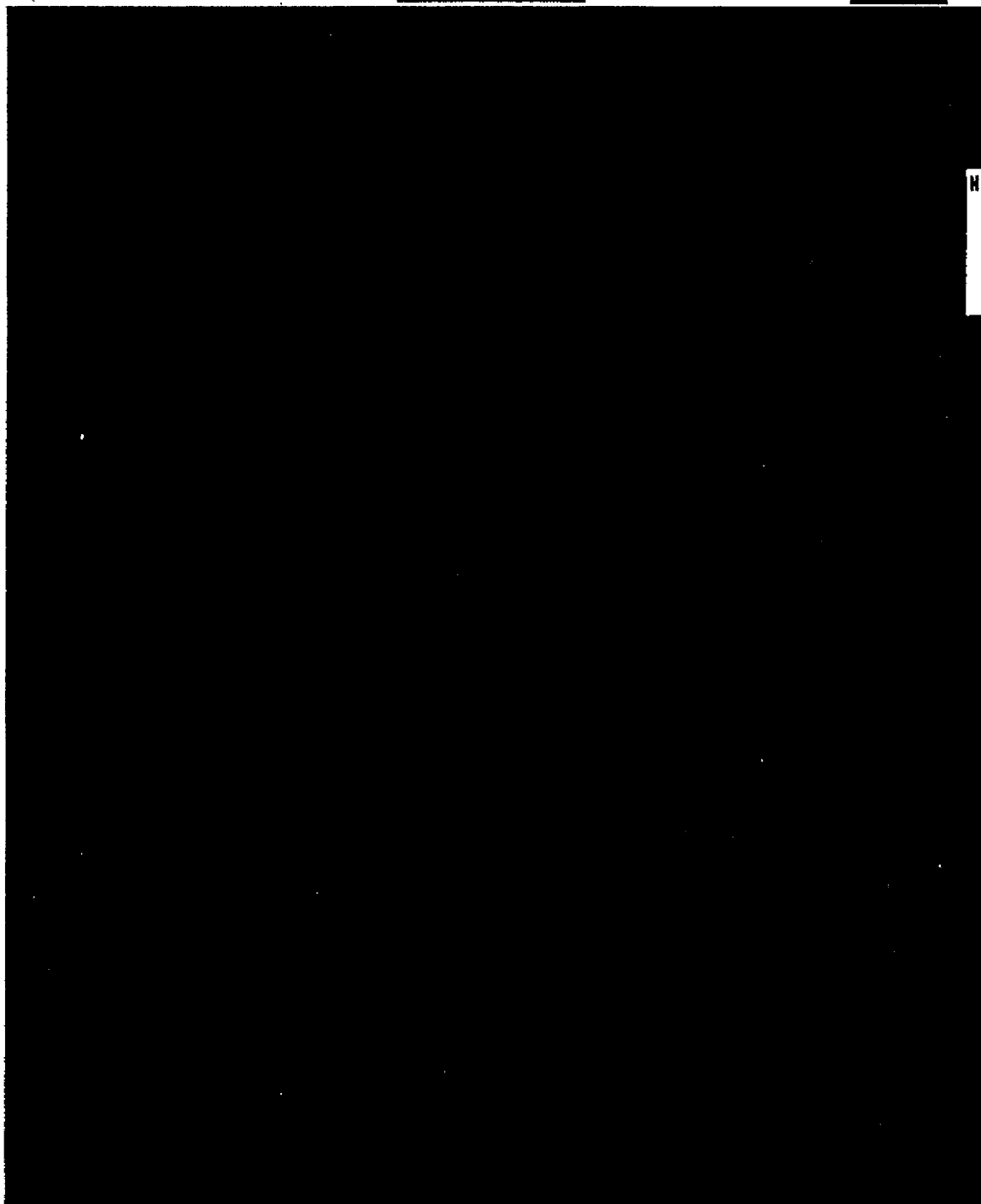


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CHILE

Constitutional Rule Advance

Chilean President Pinochet's decision to advance the timetable for a transition to constitutional rule was made in response to continuing internal and external pressures on him to normalize political life in Chile. The announcement follows other recent changes designed to improve the country's international image.

In a nationwide speech on Wednesday, Pinochet said a new constitution will be ready by the end of the year and that a plebiscite could be held on it some time thereafter. This advance by five years the schedule outlined by Pinochet last year.

Pinochet did not mention presidential elections and was vague about the overall timing. Nevertheless, his statement left the door open to even further modifications.

Although he emphasized that it is necessary for the armed forces to retain

the "essence" of political power, Pinochet said civilians would share a larger role in government. He did not elaborate, but he may have been bidding for the cooperation of the Christian Democratic Party, the country's largest, which was banned in March 1977. The party will be reluctant to participate as long as restrictions on political activity remain in force.

Among other measures announced in his speech, Pinochet offered a wide-ranging program to pardon or to commute the sentences of all prisoners convicted by military courts for violating national security laws before and after the 1973 coup.

As many as 224 persons stand to benefit immediately. The releases will also close the books for all practical purposes on most cases that have interested human rights groups.

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